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Building a Tutor Program

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Introduction

Volunteer tutors are valuable in schools with programs for struggling readers. Tutors guide children's reading practice and encourage them to improve their reading skills. However, tutors can't replace the professional instruction provided by reading specialists. Children with serious reading problems

still need the assistance of reading specialists. The role of tutors is to provide practice with oral reading, meaningful discussion on book content, simple reading instruction, and confidence-building motivation.

A successful tutoring program includes mechanisms to recruit, screen, train, supervise, retain, and recognize tutors.

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Recruiting

Identify caring people willing to devote an hour or more each week to help a child become a better reader. You can recruit tutors from a number of sources:

Middle- and high-school students--an especially reliable source, as tutoring sessions can be scheduled during a convenient time in the school day

Peer tutors within the classroom--pairs good readers with struggling readers

University students and staff

Part-time school staff, such as bus drivers and cafeteria workers

Parent classroom volunteers

PTA/PTO members

Community service clubs, such as churches, synagogues, and organizations

Employees of small companies and large corporations

Senior citizens and residents of retirement centers

Any combination of the following can prove helpful in recruiting tutors:

Advertise in local newspapers.

Send out fliers or letters to

organizations, businesses, retirement centers, etc.

Ask the local newspaper to run an article on your tutoring program, mentioning the need for volunteers. Secure interviews on local radio or television stations.

Send out press releases to local media.

Make announcements in middle and high schools during morning announcement time, and place posters in hallways.

Hold information sessions or set up a recruiting table in the school cafeteria or hallway.

Post fliers around local colleges.

Run ads/notices in college newspapers.

Run a feature article on a specific tutor in local and college newspapers, being sure to mention the need for more volunteers.

Hire or appoint a community liaison to visit organizations and businesses in the community; the personal touch can work where other methods have failed.

Meet with local businesses and encourage them to provide release time to employees; businesses derive great benefits from having a community of readers for their future work force.

Visit public servants such as police officers and firefighters who are already accustomed to serving the public; a positive public image pays large dividends for public servants.

It is important that tutors know what is expected of them before they volunteer their time, so be clear about your program when you recruit tutors. It may be helpful to hand out a sheet outlining your expectations.

A successful tutoring program depends on recruiting competent, dedicated, and reliable volunteers. Before accepting tutors into your program, interview them and check their backgrounds. In the case

of older students, you can rely on school records and consultation with their teachers. In the case of adult volunteers, your district may require fingerprinting and certain background checks. Consult with your district office to learn about district policy.

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Training

Well-trained tutors are critical to a

successful tutoring program. Most importantly, tutors should have a basic understanding of the reading process and be good readers. They also need coaching in the use of the Reading-Tutors materials, appropriate interactions with children, the importance of being on time, and various logistical issues. Remember--time spent preparing tutors for their experience is key to getting the most out of your tutoring program.

Training sessions should involve familiarization and practice with the different types of Reading-Tutors packets. Provide tutors with a sample packet from each category. Go through

the packet contents item by item. Give tutors the opportunity to pair up and role-play--one in the role of the child, the other as the tutor. Then reverse the roles. In addition, the following tutor handouts offer instructional tips for teaching alphabet, phonological awareness, word decoding (phonics), high-frequency words, fluency, and comprehension.

[Alphabet](#)

[Phonological Awareness](#)

[Word Recognition \(Phonics\)](#)

[High-Frequency Words](#)

[Fluency](#)

[Questioning Strategies](#)

[Comprehension Strategies](#)

[Tutoring Dos and Don'ts](#)

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Supervising

Tutors improve and become more

comfortable with increased experience. Still, regular supervision and feedback are critical. A successful tutoring program requires the monitoring of tutoring sessions and constructive guidance, encouragement, and support of tutors.

Create a schedule for both students and tutors. The schedule will vary depending on whether tutors are assigned to the same student for all sessions or to different students for each session. Reading-Tutors provides [forms](#) for scheduling tutors, as well as forms for tutors to track student progress.

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Recognition

It is important to have a volunteer appreciation program. Recognition should be an ongoing, day-to-day occurrence. The following tips can help establish an atmosphere of tutor appreciation:

Take time to talk with tutors each day.

Send thank-you notes/cards regularly.

Greet tutors by name.

Send birthday cards.

Provide a treat jar in the tutoring area.

Invite tutors to staff meetings.

Hold special recognition events.

Provide certificates of appreciation.

Take and post pictures of the tutor working with a child.

Run a "Tutor of the Week" feature in the local newspaper.

Make tutor appreciation buttons.

Have the child write a special message to her or his tutor.

Solicit local businesses to provide coupons--such as for pizza, car washes, or ice cream--to give to tutors.

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Identifying Student Needs

Every school has children who are challenged readers. These are the

children who can benefit most from the additional instruction, support, and encouragement given by tutors. Finding those students who have the greatest needs and assessing their weaknesses can be accomplished by analyzing student performance on various inventories and by consulting with teachers. When students report for their tutoring sessions, they should receive instruction that addresses their weaknesses.

Reading-Tutors provides a collection of quick-check assessments to diagnose a child's needs and determine the appropriate packets for each tutoring session. For example, a child who does

not recognize most uppercase and lowercase letters in the alphabet assessment should be tutored using the alphabet packets. A child unable to decode simple CVC nonsense words should be tutored using consonant and short-vowel tutor packets.

While the [assessments](#) are easy to administer, they are not intended for tutor use. Classroom teachers or trained professionals are best suited to administer and interpret these assessments.

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How to Use Reading-Tutors Resources

Reading-Tutors is easy to use. Just choose the appropriate resource packets. Then print and assemble as many packets as you need for your tutoring program.

Tutoring Programs: After identifying students who will participate in your tutoring program and analyzing each student's needs, determine which packets you will use. Go to the appropriate

category, select the desired packets, and download and print the packet contents. Generally you will need only one of each packet, unless your program is offered at a number of different sites. In that case, you will need a separate set of resources for each tutoring site.

It is probably best to print, assemble, organize, and store a complete set of tutor packets for your program. Retrieve a packet as needed, give it to the tutor, and return it to its storage device after the session.

An alternative is to assign tutors the lesson packets they will use in their tutoring sessions. Then have them access

the packets from the Web site, print, and assemble them on their own. This will require some training to ensure they know how to access and assemble the materials.

Once the packets have been printed and assembled and tutors have been trained, the use of each packet is self-explanatory. The easy-to-understand instructions contained in each packet have been written specifically for tutors.

Estimated time allotments are provided for each lesson step. Specific resources used for each step are identified next to the instructions. Tutors should simply follow the lesson sequence laid out in

the Tips for Tutors pages in each packet. Tutors can adjust the pace of instruction as needed. Repetition of various steps can be beneficial, while too fast a pace might inhibit progress. Time allotments are only recommendations.

The decision to allow children to keep the companion books is the choice of each program coordinator. If companion books are given out to each child, you will need to replace books in each packet after each tutoring session. It is a good idea initially to print extra copies of the books and file them, along with the packet, in your storage device. This way you can replace the book when the packet is returned. And the packet will

be ready to use for the next tutoring session.

Individual Tutors: If you are a private tutor, a parent, or a classroom teacher using the tutoring resources with parents or other classroom volunteers, you can make up the packets as needed. If you plan to reuse the resources with other children, you will want to devise a system for storing and retrieving.

More information on [Assembling Packets](#).